

Link Letter No.7 November 2009

"But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, though you are small among the clans of Judah, out of you will come for me one who will be ruler over Israel, whose origins are from of old, from ancient times."

Micah 5:1-3



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Dear friends and supporters,

Greetings from Bethlehem at this Christmas time!

What does Christmas mean for you?

Do you dread Christmas or is it a time of peace, happiness, family, gifts, church, and generally having a good time? I know that for some it is a time that is feared and often to be endured. For many it is a reminder of how things have been, of memories



and experiences that have not always been good and for others it highlights their situation now. For others it will be good and a time to reflect on the real meaning of Christmas.

Here in Bethlehem, the reality of Christmas is far from the image we seem to have in the West – the "little town", "baby in a manger", "carol singing" "mince pies" and so on, all these things that we associate with Christmas and often



Church of the Nativity

enjoy. Bethlehem is a small town very much affected by the occupation, struggling economically through restricted access, lack of supplies, cut off by a wall from the rest of the country and a gradually diminishing population.

This year there will be memories of the Gaza war that took place at the end of December. There are many who struggle just to maintain day-to-day life but this is the place where our Saviour chose to be born. The reality of Bethlehem is so different from the image we often have in our minds but the

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The Bible College graduation

message of Christmas always remains the same. Christ came as a babe to this Holy Land as part of God's amazing plan for our world. Not all the carols, the Christmas messages, the presents and kind acts, even the gospel narratives can truly express the wonderful purpose of God in sending His Son to save us. *What does it really mean for us this Christmas?*

An eventful year

This has been an eventful year for me here in Bethlehem. The highlights include Graduation and the 30th anniversary for the Bible College, a visit to Gaza in June, a month at Easter doing deputation and a visit from St Saviour's church group. For the Bible College there was the Summer Camp for over 100 children, the start of the next stage in the new building which is now well on its way to completion and, for the first time, running an MA program in Nazareth and Bethlehem.

A change of location...

This is my second year here and it hard to believe that two years have passed. I have enjoyed making friends and living in the community and my Arabic has improved thanks to Selwa, Dr Bishara's wife. However, I have to tell you that due to recent restrictions by the Israeli government, visas are much harder to obtain and my visa is due to run out at the end of December with little chance of renewal. The regulations are causing many problems for longer and short-term volunteers and many are being forced to reconsider their work here.

But we know our God is an awesome God and since I knew about the visa situation, Bishop Suhail and the Diocese of

Jerusalem have offered me a one-year placement in Jordan where I can support the Diocese work in the area and still continue to support the Bible College. I am also hoping to strengthen my Arabic as Jordan has some of the best language training schools. So please do keep **us** in your prayers and when I say us, I mean all the people who are trying to volunteer in Palestine to support local believers.

Prayer requests

- Pray for Bethlehem this Christmas, that peace will be found in the hearts of people amongst the continued conflict situation
- Pray for a willingness by those in authority to strive for a good solution to the political conflict and to seek a way forward in a complex and difficult situation
- Pray that Christmas will be a time of remembering the true meaning of the coming of our Saviour
- Please pray for my future.

May God bless you

Ruth



New building - see text left

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